

Wellness Notes

Kidney Disease*

(Part II)

● Risk Factors and Prevention

Diabetes and high blood pressure are the two leading causes of kidney disease. Both diabetes and high blood pressure damage the small blood vessels in your kidneys and can cause kidney disease -- without you feeling it.

There are several other risk factors for kidney disease. Cardiovascular (heart) disease is a risk factor. So is family history: if you have a mother, father, sister, or brother who has had kidney disease, then you are at increased risk. Ethnicity can also be a risk factor. African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans tend to have a greater risk for kidney disease. This is mostly due to higher rates of diabetes and high blood pressure in these communities, although there may be other reasons.

If you have ANY of these risk factors, talk to your health care provider about getting tested for kidney disease. You can't feel kidney disease, so it is very important to get tested if you are at risk. By taking steps to control your diabetes and high blood pressure, you can keep your kidneys healthy longer. Manage your diabetes and high blood pressure by eating healthy foods, staying active, taking your medicines as prescribed, and seeing your doctor regularly.

If you keep these risk factors under control -- especially your blood pressure -- you may be able to postpone and even prevent kidney failure.

● Symptoms and Diagnosis

Kidney disease is often called a "silent" disease, because most people have no symptoms before they are diagnosed. In fact, you might feel just fine until your kidneys have almost stopped working. Do NOT wait for symptoms! Lab tests are the only way to know if you have kidney disease. The sooner kidney disease is found, the sooner you can take steps to keep your kidneys healthier longer.

A blood test and a urine test are used to find kidney disease. If you have diabetes, you should get both of these tests every year. If you have high blood pressure, you should also get tested regularly -- ask your health care provider how often you should be tested and ask what you can do to keep your kidneys healthy.